

Soldiers from the 36th Engineer Brigade, 20th Engineer Battalion, Compete in the 2009 Best Sapper Competition by 1LT Sean Christopherson

In April, Fort Leonard Wood hosted the annual Best Sapper Competition. The Competition is the Engineer equivalent of the Best Ranger Competition, showcasing the Army's elite Soldiers in combat engineering military occupation specialties.

34 teams, representing 12 different posts, ranks Major to Private First Class, competed in this year in a variety of demanding and exhausting events. They included land navigation, mountaineering, helocasting, road marches, weapon assembly and disassembly, knots and rope systems, and what engineers like to do best, blow things up.

The six events covered more than 40 miles of wooded terrain and started with a nonstandard physical fitness test of five minutes of push-ups, five minutes of sit-ups, and three minutes of pull-ups and ended with a three-mile run in interceptor body armor and small-arms protective-insert plates that began the process of weeding out the teams.

After a helocast and poncho raft swim, the competitors entered the round robin phase faced with challenges that included a stress shoot, timber-cutting charge, counter-force charge, MOUT breach and an urban challenge.

Other events during the competition included a 15-mile road march and a series of Sapper stakes with tests that ranged from weapons and knot identification to patient airlift operations, locating explosive charges, combat-life-saving techniques and an obstacle course.

A land-navigation course and an X-mile run that throws in such obstacles as running with protective mask, log cut and carry, hauling Bangalore crates, an M-15 relay, tire flip, picket pounding, dummy carry and other engineer-related obstacles.

The competition is open to any Soldier, Sailor, Airman, or Marine who has earned the Sapper tab by successfully completing the 28-day Sapper Leader Course, where fewer than 50 percent of the students graduate. Engineers in the 21 career series, who don't have Sapper tabs, are also allowed to compete.

The 20th Engineer Battalion sent seven, thirty-four total, teams to compete in this year's Best Sapper Competition. The team were as follows: 1LT Browning and SGT Suarez, 1LT Hutton and SSG Macdougall, SPC Lumpkin and SGT Cook, SSG Stanley and SGT Cunningham, 2LT Judson and 2LT Corken, 1LT Smith and 1LT Phillips, SSG Rasavong and SGT Forester.

The 20th took the time to celebrate and send their teams off to compete a few days before the competition.



COL Savre talks to members of the Best Sapper Teams prior to their departure



The Best Sapper Competitors pose for a picture with COL Savre



LTC Andrysiak talks to his troops, 20th Engineer Battalion, as they send their Best Sapper competitors to the competition



SPC Lumpkin and SGT Cook carry a poncho raft during day 1



SSG Rasavong and SGT Forester during the day 1